

ZOË KELIHER
Sr. Air Safety Investigator
Office of Aviation Safety – Western Pacific Region

All persons listed were interviewed by NTSB personnel:

The following is a summary of conversation:

ROBERT CHRISTENSEN (PILOT)

The pilot stated that he was involved in an accident during a local pumpkin drop event that took place on a farmer's field. He departed from Rexburg Airport (KRXE) around 10:00 a.m., and the pumpkin drop festivities began around 11:00 or 11:30 a.m. He estimated that he was the third participant and that the accident occurred around noon.

He explained that the event was being held on a farm field with a makeshift landing strip. The prevailing winds were typically south to north, but on the day of the event, they were blowing from north to south, creating a tailwind if landing from the south. This presented a choice between landing with a significant tailwind or landing over power lines. He and others elected to land over the wires.

The pilot stated that he dropped his pumpkins but missed the target by a long distance. During his landing, he flew over one set of power lines, reduced power to descend and land, and then inadvertently struck a second, parallel set of wires that he had not seen. He clarified that he knew the first set of wires were there and had overflown them, but he didn't realize there was a second set spaced about 30 to 40 yards apart. When descending, he impacted the second set of wires, which brought the airplane to an abrupt stop. He confirmed that there were no mechanical malfunctions or failures with the airplane prior to the accident. The airplane was operating normally. He had already landed on the field earlier in the day, with a strong tailwind, which he described as "sporty." For the second approach, he attempted to land in the opposite direction to avoid the tailwind, but that required flying over the wires.

The farmer, aware of the potential hazard, had tied yellow plastic tape (similar to crime scene tape) on the support cables of the wires to make them more visible. However, wind had blown the tape against the pole, rendering it ineffective as a visual warning.

The pilot estimated the wind at the time of the accident was about 15 knots, from north to south. He had previously landed at that location, and had rebuilt the airplane himself, accumulating about 500 hours in that specific airplane. He had over 10,200 hours of total flight time.

He noted that he was hospitalized for 12 weeks following the accident and had been living with his daughter afterward.